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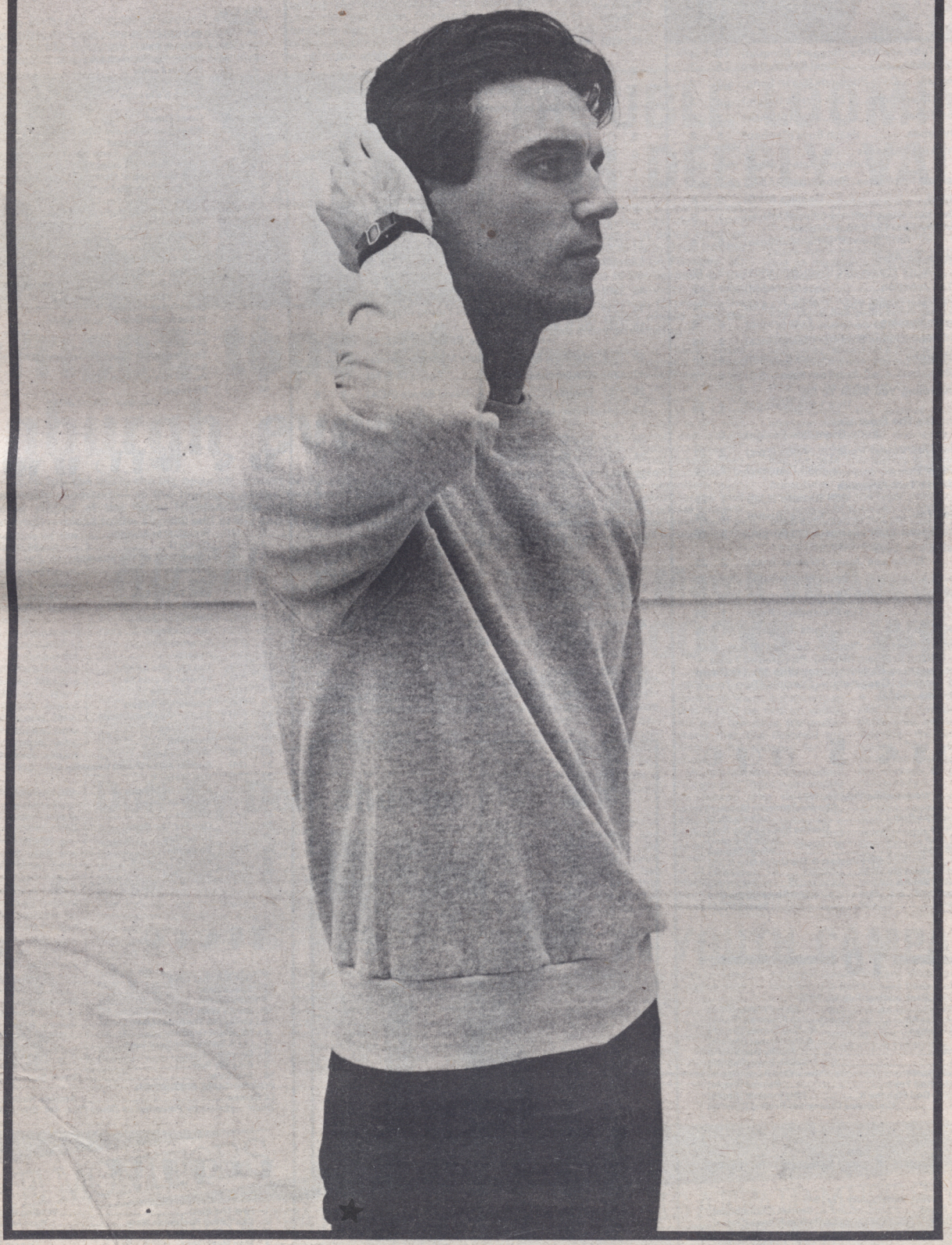

DAVID BYRNE remembers F. Scott Fitzgerald in exile/Pic: PENNIE SMITH

AMERICANS IN PARIS
THE TALKING HEADS THAT ATE MONTMARTRE

pages 32-4

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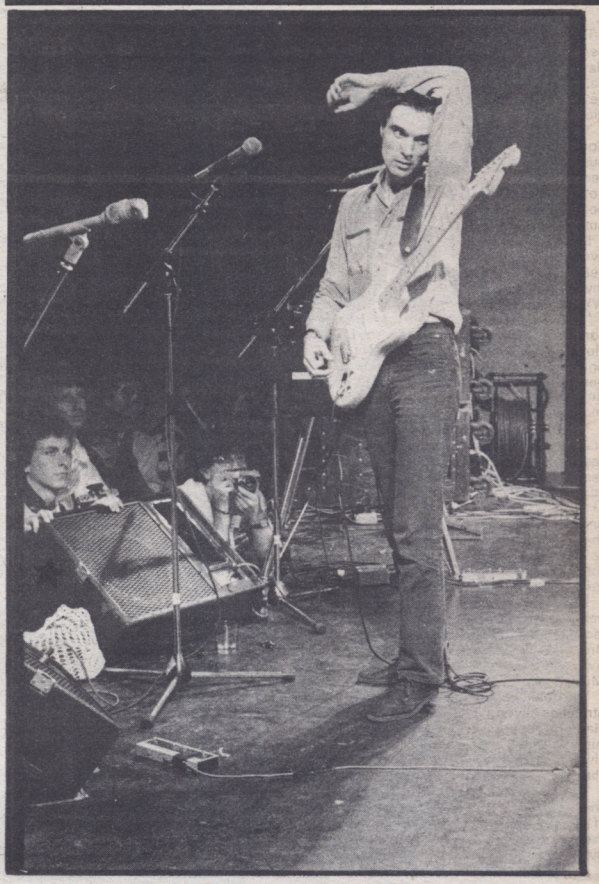


THE SCENE: Paris, France, July 10. Bastille Day looms, Talking Heads and their 'guests' The B52s have just completed a mini-European jaunt minus Great Britain. Tonight they played a concert of manic stature in the ultra-chic Theatre du Palace before a packed house of 1500 well behaved and even better dressed French rockers — now people, night people.

After the show promoter Frederic Serfati has a party scheduled in a massive mansion on the Left Bank, in a residential/financial/cultural haven. The setting here on the Passage de la Visitation is pretty impressive, even by the bourgeois and luxurious standards of Paris.

This ain't no ordinary gaff: the entrance hall alone is stuffed with enough antique treasures to furnish the dreams of the most extravagant insolvent. Room after room reveals the splendours of a lifestyle which may not have changed one jot since the demise of the Sun King. Everythingis renaissance, Louisian, rich and tasteful.

So what have we here, and who? Meet the president of Rolling Stone records, Earl somebodyorother, who's holding court.

"You must, simply *must* meet him," one partygoer informs the world in general.

Feeling no pressing need to hobnob with such a luminary I stagger forward nevertheless, only to be bored stiff by the verbosity of a canny American businessman who fancies he's some kind of wit.

"Why is it that you British press chaps are always criticising The Rolling Stones?" he drawls, slightly the worse for drink.

Without bothering to wait for an answer Earl sways benignly then heads off. Meanwhile in the toot-up room, or one of them, highbrow scene makers jostle for nasal laxatives and lay out their lines on 18th Century glass-topped tables.

Now, into this divine and decadent soiree (and don't think I didn't enjoy it, 'cos I did) stumbles one of the stars of the show. Eyes right for the entrance of David Byrne, the lead figure in the Talking Heads psychodrama, an everday story of collegiate city folk.

Tonight everyone must make his/her entrance with aplomb. Cindy, the B52 with the 'Georgia Mushroom' hairpiece and batting, wet eyes makes hers by slouching into the walled garden slugging on a bottle of Heineken.

All around us lies the debris of the French vine, spouting vintage champagnes, elegant bouquets of Burgundy and scented Chateau Lafittes, but Cindy has her beer.

She may look decidedly unglamorous when set up beside the immaculately haute coutured and obscenely beautiful French belles, but for this undying devotion to the trash aesthetic Cindy wins tonight's star prize, a ten minute chat with old Earl.

Still, *the* grand entrance is reserved for David Byrne, who recoils from the attention of his hosts with that characteristic neurotic dread of having to exchange small talk. Perhaps it's nerves then, or maybe it was the vodka I saw David imbibing in such liberal quantities earlier on, but here he comes, out of the door, across the path and SPLAT!

UH—OH! David Byrne just fell into a hole. His plate of goodies flies off at an angle, covering the shrubbery with pate de fois gras and mayonnaise. Onlookers stifle their chuckles and David is helped to his feet by umpteen willing hands. He's slightly cut, half-cut, but the shock wears off.

Falling over gets you accepted, even in Paris, and the sight of Byrne's lanky six-foot frame spreading its length amongst the foliage is soon forgotten.

Later on he smirks: "I felt so embarrassed but perhaps that was what was expected of me, that I fall in a hole and spill food everywhere."

Byrne disappears for the rest of the evening to the kitchen, where else? Out of the gaze he proceeds to hit the bottle with a vengeance and converse with Kate B52, a lovely person who can't get over "everything bein' so old an'all. I bet this picture is real valuable, it's so pretty. Where can I git me a glass of water?"

David Byrne points her in the general direction of the taps and fumbles for a lychee.

By day this man is mild mannered, polite and slightly distant. "I'm fairly shy, yes. Not too shy — but I don't start conversations with people I don't know, the others are better at that than me. I guess you could say that I meditate a lot, or just observe. Sometimes I watch TV or look our of a car window and I drift off into my world. I never was too gregarious."

CUT TO the final night of the Talking Heads' French sojourn. Another party has been thrown in their honour in *the* Parisian niterie, an underground disco called Les Baines Douches, formerly a public bath.

Impressions of Paris as a 20th Century throwback to the excesses of Ancient Rome are borne out by this club. Come on downstairs, where the sound system blasts out Grace Jones and Dillinger, and the well-heeled, high-brow post-punk kids are waking up for the late shift.

In one corner the complex Heads and B52s manager Gary Kirfirst is shooting French pool, a bastardised billiards sans pockets, and knocking spots off the locals. Effeminate black boys smooch around the perimeter, blowing kisses. "Anybody wanna make some easy money?" Kerferst is cleaning up.

A French groover approaches Byrne, who's perched on a wall, meditating. "You want to meet some nice French girls,oui?"

Byrne: "Oh, err, umm, nooo. I wouldn't know what to say to them. Thanks all the same."

Hedwige, the former Queen of the Paris punks, a tall blond with a Fred Perry shirt, is introduced quite po-faced with her erstwhile title. "I 'ave my own band now, eet's better than new wave."

On the dance floor a wild 15-year-old mademoiselle is frugging with total abandon. This is Ionesco, a direct descendant of the legendary French playwright and author. Her microskirt defies the laws of gravity and even the cucumber cool French lads can't remove their eyes.

My companion tells me that Ionesco was once more beautiful. "When she was twelve, 'er mama took some photographs of 'er nekkid, perhaps now she is a bit fat and crazy."

Two people, one of indeterminate sex, have got their hooks onto David Byrne. There's a momentary flare-up, a lovers' tiff and whoosh, the girl partner sulks off to watch porn movies through the hole in the wall. Her friend stays put by the green inviting pool. "She is a transvestite, n'est ce pas," whispers my companion loudly.

Maybe it's the Jack Danny but I'd swear she just hitched her top down. A breast pops out and is casually tucked in again. Byrne décides this is all too much and departs for the hotel to play his tapes.

LET'S FLASHBACK to the Palace. Some venue. Given that the French are hell-bent on enjoying the remainder of this century while they can you have to admit that their style is something else. It's style without the revolt, punk without the punch but with all the trappings fully developed, the sense of occasion, the night out.

Maybe these kids are bored with the high quality of their lives, maybe they feel guilty about their wealth, it could be that they lack a sense of purpose or reality. Or have they just got it right?

The political leaders of the western world are fiddling while their ideals burn, but these people are having fun while David Byrne's.

If the edifices are crumbling, this decadence is the sure sign that the basic superstructure is fucked. But rather than worry about the consequences, get nihilistic and spit on their peers, the French are out to find a real good time.

Even at a rock and roll concert there is a sense of civilised frisson. Life is one big party and everyone with a ticket gets in.

Outside a few 100 stragglers fight amongst themselves but ignore les flics, nasty vicious sadists with a license to maim. Inside the temperature is boiling. The B52s have just whipped up the standing hordes to the state where underearm deodorant ceases to function and now Talking Heads are ready to deliver their repertoire.

The band has improved immeasurably over the last year. The never ending journey into the American hinterland has honed up their act and sharpened their cynicism. Any one member of the group will admit that touring is getting them down.

Dig this schedule. Three months roadwork in the States was followed in May by the making of their third album, 'Fear Of Music', with producer Brian Eno, 11 tracks in ten days. Then they left for Australia, New Zealand, and back to Europe. The day after this European trip Talking Heads were catching a plane back across the world to Japan, the mega yen market, a necessary extension of the thinking rock band's itinerary.

Pretty soon the Eastern bloc will open its borders to the western scourge. By 1984 there are going to be more potential concert halls in the world that ever seemed likely in the innocent '60s.

The Talking Heads are very much a part of this mad circus but at the moment they have retained sufficient integrity and independence to stay outside the soul destroying *arena* circuit.

They have just renegotiated their Sire contract, are undoubtedly comfortable, but fortunately are not complacent. Having completed a fairly lacklustre set of festivals in Belgium and Denmark. They are primed to deliver the goods in a proper hall.

Talking Pictures: PENNIE SMITH

NG HEADS A LA CARTE

The nucleus of their set bears testimony to months spent on perfecting each song, and suggests a capacity for improvisation. Having spent two albums and three years working up the chops Talking Heads are fast approaching that magic moment when, hey presto, learning becomes an escape from technique and the pieces fall together of their own accord.

Tonight is a classic set, beginning with the staple diet of 'Big Country', its lazy C/W diatribe set off by a ludicrously funky husband and wife backbeat. Then the opening of the rock star's secret jornal, 'Warning Sign' combinging myth and truth — "I've got money now, c'mon baby". Ordinarily, the man wouldn't say boo to a goose but on stage he's transformed, a real live wire, a nutcase, an exposer of every frayed nerve ending.

Byrne's own performance is staggering. It encapsulates everything that seemed interesting in Bowie and Ferry all those years back and creams them with a totally original approach. His thyroid glands are pumping towards the red zone, danger level. What goes through his head?

"I get taken over by the live act. The adrenalin rush for me is complete. I seem to be running around while everyone else is in slow motion. It's exciting but frightening and wonderful. The only thing that disappoint me is when a crowd shouts out for the better known songs — that's not likely to boost your opinion of an audience . But audiences *will* tire of the obviously manipulative stuff.

"My own perspective when I go to a show is I hate that pop star routine. I assume that our audience wants to be treated with respect. We made it a rule never to use artificial crowd responses. Then again we try and play in decent places — comfortable halls or clubs with good acoustics.

"Of course we don't always succeed. Sometimes the venues are far from ideal. The bouncers manhandle the audience when there will only be a few trouble makers on quaaludes. Promoters tend to assume the worst. Because of a minority they mistreat the majority. I admit that a lot of times we end up playing in terrible places, but you just try your best."

This particular night there's no hint of an audience who've come for the hits. Instead they are treated to a daring set which includes the resurrected 'Love Goes To Building On Fire' ("We dropped that for a year, then realised we were missing it"), plus five brand new numbers from the August-scheduled 'Fear Of Music'.

The quality of the band is apparent in ensemble playing that stretches beyond the narrow confines of quirky rock. Jerry Harrison coaxes all manner of weird, engrossing textures from his small arsenal of keyboards, conventional and synthetic. His rhythm guitar work, never more than effectively rudimentary in the past, has taken an appreciable step forward.

The innovations that the Harrison and Byrne axis have up their musical sleeve stamps the group as legitimate purveyors of a vibrant melodic understanding. They are ready to stand comparison with the champions of any age whilst possessing a custom sound as taut and delicious as prime Television.

And spare a thought for the extramarital thrills oozing from the Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz rhythm section, funk ascloseasthis being a real rarity in normal white terms.

Before the show Tina and a small party of the English speaking contingent converge on a street cafe to while away her pre-gig blues. The diminutive, blond bassist chainsmokes her edginess into the distance, a bundle of wirey worry and stomach turning fear.

"Even after three years I get physically ill before concerts. We used to look nervous on stage too but that doesn't show anymore, it's just the waiting that gets to you. If I ate anything now I'd be sick."

MAX BELL samples the musical menu as Les Tetes Parlantes chew up Paris and spit out the nasty bits. David Byrne tells more tales about creativity and technology.

The pressure is greater tonight than usual. Talking Heads are in the invidious position of topping over a support band, B52s, whose current star is so high in the critical eye that any amount of shoddiness due to lack of match practice seems to have been completely forgiven.

Ironically, Heads enjoyed a similar license when they toured Europe with Mrs Ramone's favourite sons in 1977. Today the two bands are not in direct competition with each other but the tension of record company hype lingers in the background. The Palace is chock full of B52s posters but not one Talking Heads poster. Little things like that can sap a band's confidence even before they've stepped on stage.

Talking Heads have also suffered some indignities at the hands of their New York counterparts. There have been riling espisodes with Sire stablemates The Ramones over bill topping and dressing room status, Joey Ramone allegedly proving to be a particularly obnoxious and paranoid individual when any threat to his ego is at stake.

There again, the Patti Smith Band, once the doyens of the New York artistic clique, have done their best to sequester their position and shove it down their peers' throats. Tina lets slip tales of snubbing at the hands of Miss Patti Lee that don't bear repeating.

To their credit Talking Heads are not the kind of people to pull any such stroke on lesser known kin. The B52s are afforded every courtesy they could wish for. When the audience takes them to its collective heart, the headliners don't adopt the 'let's go out there and blow these novices offstage' rap. Intead they pay credit to their guests' ability to put the crowd in an up mood.

The band's dislike of a cushioned reception is most obvious in their handling of the best known numbers, 'Thank You For Sending Me An Angel', 'Take Me To The River' and the inevitably popular 'Psycho Killer', replete with French chorus and singalong rock and roll lingua franca.

It's here that the hard work and sense of adventure pays off in spades.

While it would be easier to rest on the laurels of 'motions' performance, Byrne whips himself into a state of controlled frenzy that inspires his vocal nuance, his postured, jerky electric dance and his instrumental expertise, which now rivals that of Tom Verlaine for inflection and attack.

He moves as if brain and voice were slightly at odds with each other. . .watch him work the changes, dramatically and emotionally. Whoever said this band were cold or premeditated must have been brought up in the wrong rock environment. On the contrary, Talking Heads today are as involving, intriguing, and as plain danceable as any band on this planet. Period.

DAVID BYRNE'S hotel room is dominated by his closest travelling companion — a sophisticated tape deck stereo system that packs into a brief case. Amongst his current listening selection there are tapes of the new Neil Young and Bowie albums, Steel Pulse, Ultravox and Kraftwerk, Berlin Zoo, Ennio Morricone and, of course, Talking Heads.

Byrne's bedside reading includes Dr Hunter S Thompson's *Fear and Loathing On The Campaign Trail 1972, Paris Metro* and *Actuel*, a French almanac for the '80s where the standard of imagery and the breadth of the articles puts any English magazine to abject shame.

Aside from these mental relaxants Byrne travels light. Two months' wardrobe fits into one holdall. He makes no distinction between on and off stage attire, preferring his familiar garb of sweatshirt, black trousers and sensible shoes to anything more flashy.

Despite this conservative, college boy clean-cut demeanour there is one aspect of his apperance which causes him pleasure. David Byrne evidently sets great store by his hair style, his grey flecked black straight hair is his most assertive superficial characteristic.

Facially, Byrne modulates through stages of chronic introversion to private, wicked thoughts and an openly sardonic cheeky grin with a hint of wolverine around the edges.

His speech is slow and checked by qualification as if the words were being weighed on a spring balance. Usually he tilts towards self-deprecation and irony, taking every question at face value and avoiding any hint of conceit or artistic justification.

Given the artificiality of any interview, the instant opinion and the discretion of the journalist, Byrne is quite at odds with the picture I had of him as a wilfully oblique person. His assertiveness is greater than his internal solitude, even to the extent that when the interview is first mooted and other members of the band express a desire to attend he rebuffs them firmly — "No, I want to talk separately."

While the band zip down to Montmartre to shoot a photo session Byrne leaves me in his room to listen to the new album, 'Fear Of Music', a far remove from 'More Songs'. Lyrically, the material maintains Byrne's favourite device, the third person narrator, but the subject matter is more advanced, moodier and abstract.

Many of the titles are simple nouns, 'Mind', 'Paper', 'Cities', 'Air', 'Heaven', 'Animals' and 'Drugs' (formerly 'Electricity'). Themes and styles are unfamiliar, save for the now recognisable group 'sound'. The move towards complex rhythmic structures and the contrast of vocal idiosyncrasies with melodic texturing is immediately clear.

"The people who disliked what Eno did to the second album will probably dislike this one more," Byrne mutters with a grin. He picks up a Swiss Army knife and runs his thumb down the blade.

"See, they assume that it's all his doing. Every time they hear a weird sound it's 'Aah, there he is' — when a lot of time it's us, our ideas."

This sense of misunderstanding is a sore point, then?

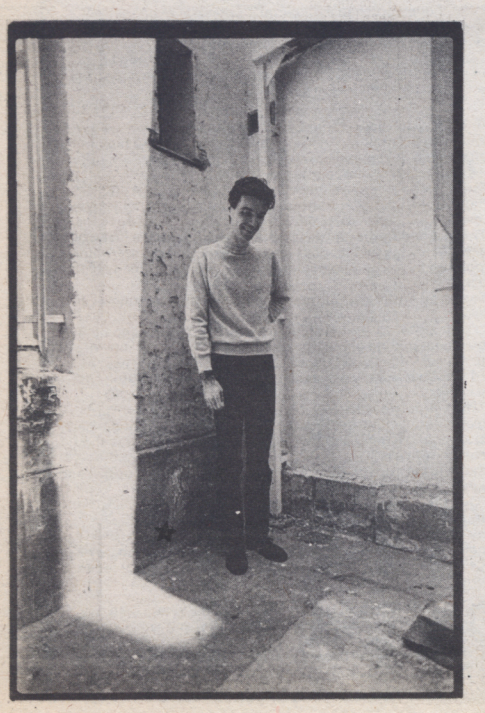
"Well, people have missed the humour, or at least undervalued it; especially in the singing — I send myself up a bit. I have fun with it. Some of the quirky little things that end up on record I think are real funny — the first coupla times anyway. Jokes always wear off after a while. It isn't obvious humour; there are no knee slappers."

The first song, 'I Zimbra', utilises an African rhythm, lush percussive effects treated by some spectacular synthesiser colouration. It's the kind of deceptively simple sound that Brian Eno experimented with on 'Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy' or 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' but with a more integrated, less self-conscious appeal. The vocal is a multi-layered nonsense babble, African esperanto.

Towards the end Robert Fripp contributes a fragment of a

■ *Continues over page*

"Anyone who tries to be naive these days is a fool. I know that most of this business is just merchandise."



Clockwise from left: David Byrne escapes suntan/Tina Weymouth works on hers/Tina nitpicks hubby Chris Frantz's coat/Jerry Harrison hose down.

T. HEADS CONT.

■ *From previous page*

solo.

Byrne has a selection of South African music with him, notably 'Rhythm Of Resistance'.

"Some of that stuff is difficult to listen to. It's not something you grow up with. With the ethnographic records you have to concentrate to hear what's going on, and for me it isn't always easy. But with Fela . . . stuff like that, you know . . . just listen to it. It might be chants or something but it's no trouble, no sweat."

Byrne's interest in ethnic musical forms goes beyond the hip, elitist viewpoint, being both academic and practical. The title of the album, 'Fear Of Music' was drawn from a technical book called *Music And The Brain:* "It has long sections devoted to musically associated diseases. There was a word with a long Latin title, a phobia that certain people have, a real fear of music. Any kind of music is obnoxious to them and they have to be sent to live in the countryside.

"It's such a contradiction of the attitude we have to music, that it appealed to me. The album is also a bit frightening; not shocking but spooky and melancholy. I enjoy it.

"It's my ambition to write some really sad songs but I haven't succeeded yet. People assume that when you perform a sad song you need to use some method acting to get it in the right mood. Actually it works the other way. If the song is well constructed it will cause the emotions.

"It's true that there are hardly any songs about relationships this time. Only 'Mind' comes close to being a love song. It's best to get away from them. I mean, I like a lot of other people's love songs but it's a horrible thing to have to sing about every night. Eventually, the subject becomes meaningless.

Apres gig.

"These abstract subjects are more open to different interpretations — they don't matter so much."

I PUT IT to Byrne that he's been damned in the past by writers who assume that the lyrics reflect his own viewpoint, whereas they are often fictional devices, vehicles for all manner of contradictory statements.

It's obvious Byrne uses the stage as a platform for expressing many opinions which he'd be too reticent to say to a person's face. "I might express the ideas privately but not so drastically. In a song I can spout off an idea that would sound ridiculous in a conversation."

The best example of this on 'More Songs' was 'Artists Only', which Byrne didn't even write. Predictably, some of our brethren took exception to the line *'I don't have to prove that I'm creative'.*

"A guy called Wayne Zieve wrote the lyric on that. I don't know anything about it. He was crashing at our place (the Byrne and Harrison residence) and he used to scribble messages on bits of paper and leave 'em round the room. I just liked that one so I wrote some music for it. Now he gets royalties, which spoils the effect somewhat.

"Generally, writers understand a bit of the band but they naturally focus on the lyrics, 'cos it's hard to write more than a couple of sentences about music — there's not a lot you can say about a guitar solo.

"As far as the band goes, they don't mind the words too much. They wouldn't mind writing but they're good about it. It's hardest for Chris and Tina when we're in the studio. They play and that's it. Brian (Eno), Jerry and me play with the mixing. Chris and Tina like to be around, but it gets boring after a while. That frustrates them . . ."

To avoid this inequality 'Fear Of Music' was recorded in a mobile studio hooked up to the Frantz family's Long Island loft. The band rehearsed for ten days, working up basic tracks, then recorded half the album in two days.

Most bands in Talking Heads' position would spend three or four months on a third album and a lot more money.

"Eno got back to London from Bangkok. I phoned him and he came straight over. He layed less on this one than before, so though it's said he's like a fifth member he isn't there when we record basic tracks. It was my idea to be on our own, without a producer for a while; we did OK, we didn't fight too much.

"We made the record in two sessions on the mobile, and it worked better; it was more relaxing. Initially, we achieved a near live sound. There was none of that stuff with headphones and engineers and 'I can't hear the drums' nonsense.

"Of course we treated it with studio care. We spent a lot of the time sequencing tracks. I've never liked the variety approach where a band show how clever they are — y'know, following a ballad with a rocker, then a lush song. We try to group them for similarities. That sounds premeditated though; it was an afterthought."

One of the strangest songs on the record is 'Animals', in which starts off as an oddball paean to animal characteristics — *"Animals are pretty smart/They shit in the park/They see in the dark"* — until suddenly the listener realises the furries have taken over and they're not domesticating the humans.

"That was the last song I wrote. It was a conscious attempt to go back to the old style but it ended up more complex, it has a 7/4 rhythm or something . . . I don't understand. It's jerky but I can't play the guitar part and sing it live yet. I got excited when I wrote it though. There are lots of lyrics I didn't use."

Byrne takes a childlike delight in his own words, which remove a lot of cryptic and sinister veils from his sub-conscious.

The most immediately evocative song on 'Fear Of Music' is the most harrowing: 'Life During Wartime', set in a fictional future, say tomorrow — when snipers on the streets and suburban guerilla warfare are the norm.

Byrne reckons he's ready for the inevitable:

"Living in New York you have to be. There *will* be chronic food shortages and gas shortages and people will live in hovels. Paradoxically, they'll be surrounded by computers the size of wrist watches. Calculators will be cheap. It'll be as easy to hook up your computer with a central television bank as it is to get the week's groceries.

"I think we'll be cushioned by amazing technological development and sitting on Salvation Army furniture. Everything else will be crumbling.

"It doesn't bother me too much but it isn't something to look forward to. Government surveillance becomes inevitable because there's this dilemma when you have an increase in information storage. A lot of it is for your convenience — but as more information gets on file it's bound to be misused.

"Electronic banking, where you never meet a teller or stand in a queue, is already common, and that system can only get more prevalent.

"A funny thing is that as computers do inventories the crimes may be fewer but are far more costly to the company. People can alter the programme, spin money off and go undetected for years.

"I read a book about computer crimes before I left. For example, one guy printed up a number of fake deposit slips and hid them with the blanks they keep in banks for customer's use; they all had his personal number on. After three days in which people had been depositing huge sums of money into his account, he withdrew it and split. There was no way to catch him.

"Another person had a touch-tone phone hook up to the General Electric master computer in Los Angeles. He was ordering vast supplies of wire, cables, you name it, storing it in a warehouse then selling it. These companies are so huge they don't figure anything is up. Eventually he got too arrogant and tried to sell them their own gear back."

IT'S HARD to know where Byrne fits into the framework of his own subject matter. Very few Talking Heads songs feature his first person experience, and the lyrics tend to focus on observed relationships, cliches and generalisations.

This may be a defence mechanism, an extension of his diffidence, but it is also a fine way of illuminating other people's foibles.

The fact that this is usually a novelistic or cinematic technique makes the songs that much more absorbing, although it tends to polarise listeners who recognise their own faults being mocked.

For someone so shy, Byrne has a genius for provoking a reaction:

"I've tried to write songs that are far from my usual point of view, about getting drunk and chasing after girls, but they're never successful. I don't think I can chase . . . See, if I use the third person it achieves distance. It's slightly humorous. It isn't always very nice.

"The songs 'Heaven' and 'Mind' are set in parties and bars, places where people get together, except in one of 'em the party is in someone's mind and they want it to stop. Eventually they decide they like it."

Byrne turns away to the wall, fiddling with a Camel packet and laughing manically to himself.

"One title, 'Drugs' is a psychedelic song. I like those '60s numbers where they try and describe the experience . . . They're stupid. There's a big resurgence of acid in Paris apparently. The people from the disco where we played go on huge acid binges, hiring trains and stuff. That's a little intense for me."

DAVID BYRNE grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, then attended the Rhode Island School of Design in 1970, where he met Frantz.

In those days Byrne played violin and ukelele!

■ *Continues page 49*

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TALKING HEADS

■ *From page 34*

His first rock band was The Artistics, cover version specialists who lasted as long as his college career. (Byrne dropped out, natch.)

He now lives in the Ukraine neighbourhood of Manhattan, the sort of area estate agents like to call 'seedy but bursting with character';

"I'm from near Glasgow. Baltimore was quite similar — a lot of slums, rough. People don't have a very nice time of it. It's strange to go back to Glasgow . . . I still have a lot of aunts and cousins there — I get the feeling that things have never been a lot better there."

In the past Talking Heads catalogue has been dominated not by sex or love, the usual boy-meets-girl routine that serves as brain fodder in the majority of popular styles, but by the work ethic. I wondered if Byrne saw the band as a job:

"Well, I don't think about being an artist. People assume there's a dichotomy whereby you either make *commercial* music or *interesting* music, but we go for both. I like to mix cliches from love songs and office jargon . . . "take a week off", "a job well done" . . . I've never had an office job actually. My experiences were all more menial."

Byrne makes one concession to the Peter Pan mythology of rock and roll. The people in his songs are always boys and girls, never men and women: "Even people older than me I never think of as men or women. I also tend to draw stereotypes. That annoys Tina. If I say, 'Oh, girls always eat puddings but boys prefer savouries, she goes nuts."

TALKING HEADS in 1979 are in an intriguing position. Their creative and practical muse is at a peak but the demands on their attention span are getting too big. Both Byrne and Frantz, the original members, claim to have reached the watershed as far as touring goes. For the drummer this means a tolerance of the rock lifestyle which he began by despising:

"We were always anti-stardom. Where the Stones were sexy we were frigid, where Elton John was glamourous we'd be ordinary. Now I feel more sympathetic to those people. We didn't try to be intellectual or smartass but because of our college backgrounds people assumed we were cerebral. I find a fair amount of passion in the music, it isn't a mental exercise."

And for Byrne: "I'd like to be doing other things. Touring puts you in a rut. It takes up most of the year and the way it's organised you waste so much time. That bothers me more than anything else. You're there to play, but it only takes an hour to do that."

Wherein lies the threat to any intelligent band — boredom.

Japan, Europe, the Antipodes, the American wasteland . . . rock warfare goes on in all of them, capturing territories, spreading the message. Talking Heads have come out of the New York underground and lasted the course, the only truly new wave band from the area to do so.

Reality for the idealistic group means there is no standing still; expansion is enforced.

When they started Heads reckoned it would take them five years to make an album, just to get accepted. They were wrong, Byrne recognises the dilemma:

"The business is very self-conscious. A lot of it is terrible but it could be no other way. Anyone who tries to be naive these days is a fool. The 'innocent' rock band that isn't aware of the history and the mechanisms . . . these people are in a dream world. I know that most of it is just merchandise."

Last March Byrne contributed a short essay to *High Times* magazine titled 'It Ain't Rock and Roll But I Like It', which set about revealing the techniques behind what we Westerners call 'ethnic music'.

Here are some samples you can apply to your life; they also give a fair indication of the Byrne modus operandi:

"There is a Chinese legend that the emperor Huang Ti 'ordered' the invention of music in 2697 B.C. . . ."

"The Pima Indians of the American Southwest believe that songs already exist and that the composer's job is to "untangle" them . . .

"In Japan there have been a number of recent popular songs that deal with the bribery of government officials by the Lockheed Corporation. A couple of titles are 'I Also Would Like to Get Peanuts' and 'Playing Innocence' . . ."

"In Dosso, Niger, there is an oboelike instrument called the djerma that, when played by experts, produces sounds with phonetic equivalents that can be decoded as a message by a skilled listener. Sometimes these instruments are used to make fun of individuals, without their knowledge."

NEXT TIME you listen to Talking Heads bear this information in mind, especially the last entry, then see if you can answer this simple question: Why did the artist cross the road?

That's right, 'because it was there' is the answer. And I forgot to tell you, the best track on 'Fear Of Music' is called 'Electric Guitar'. Maybe David Byrne is just fooling around after all.

PRETENDERS

■ *From page 8*

She thinks hard and long before saying: "I'm trying to be like very careful. I'm very excited by their personalities. I don't think anyone in the band is a dullard or a weak link. I could spend time with any member of the band. I think they're all very interesting personalities — and very complimentary to each other."

What does she think a rock 'n' roll band should do?

"To entertain. Absolutely. If you think that you're going to get up there to enlighten somebody you've got a pretty hot dogish attitude. I think you've got to have a little more humility than that. I have been very enlightened by watching people but that's people who haven't set out to enlighten."

You obviously don't like being interviewed.

"Who would? It's just like therapy. It's like a lot of people going to the shrink and talking about themselves for an hour but I find it . . . I'm not trying to be difficult. You know, I don't want to sit and talk about myself for hours. I'd rather go out and like play. Go on the roller coaster across the street, but I wanna be helpful and everything."

GIGTIME IN Portsmouth.

"I hate going through the front of a place to get backstage," complains Chrissie as The Pretenders enter the venue, a Mecca ballroom, much to Honeyman-Scott's delight.

"You have all these kids that want to talk to you."

It's remarks like these which have contributed to her reputation as some kind of prima donna, but I honestly think they're said simply because of an acute sense of self consciousness.

Inside the audience is predominantly male and punky, but as The Pretenders go into their set there is neither gobbing nor pogoing. It's a stunning gig, better than even last night's performance. Honeyman-Scott's humdinger of a solo in the reggaefied 'Private Lives' should have been recorded for posterity. Martin Chambers is in the same kind of form.

Without a doubt The Pretenders are a real band for the '80s. For once I don't feel like a parasite when I go backstage. I can't wait to tell them how magnificent I thought the show was.

Chambers and Honeyman-Scott are pleased with their performances but Farndon and particularly Chrissie aren't of the same mind.

"I thought it was awful," she shrieks. "It was one of those gigs where I couldn't keep my mind on what I was doing. I was looking at the audience and looking at their faces and thinking about all the press and wondering what I was doing there. I was just distracted."

Already the heat is on for The Pretenders. The album, already half completed and with Chris Thomas producing, is scheduled for October. If they split up or are ignored by the record buyers of the West it will be a tragedy, but it seems that The Pretenders have enough perspective and are down to earth enough to survive.

They also seem capable of handling the pressures which will undoubtedly come their way — pressures which Chrissie Hynde already seems to be feeling

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